

Message Text

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14-11

ACTION NEA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1754
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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, NP

SUBJ: INDIAN JOURNALISTS VISIT

1. SUMMARY. HMG HAS USED OCCASION OF VISIT TO KATHMANDU OF 12 INDIAN JOURNALISTS TO PRAISE STATE OF INDO-NEPALESE RELATIONS AND TO EXPRESS HOPE THAT "MINOR PROBLEMS" COULD BE SOLVED THROUGH BILATERAL TALKS. END SUMMARY.

2. PRIME MINISTER RIJAL GRANTED INTERVIEW MAY 20 TO 12 INDIAN JOURNALISTS WHO ARE IN KATHMANDU CELEBRATING 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF HINDI NEWS SERVICE, IN WHICH HE TOOK OBVIOUS PAINS TO EMPHASIZE IMPORTANCE HMG ATTACHES TO MAINTENANCE OF GOOD RELATIONS WITH INDIA. RIJAL SAID THAT ALTHOUGH MINOR PROBLEMS AROSE FROM TIME TO TIME THESE COULD BE SOLVED THROUGH NEGOTIATION. HE ADVOCATED A WIDER EXCHANGE OF PEOPLES AS WAY OF REMOVING "UNNECESSARY BICKERING." RIJAL CITED INDIAN ASSISTANCE IN ROAD BUILDING, INDIAN INVESTMENT, AND AGREEMENT TO PURCHASE POWER FROM FUTURE KARNALI PROJECT AS CONCRETE EXAMPLES OF IMPORTANCE INDIA PLAYS IN HMG DEVELOPMENT PLANS. AS FOR KARNALI, RIJAL SAID THAT HMG WISHED TO IMPLEMENT PROJECT AS SOON AS POSSIBLE IN ORDER

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TO MEET POWER NEEDS OF BOTH INDIA AND NEPAL. IN CONCLUSION

RIJAL ASKED JOURNALISTS TO CONVEY HIS "BEST WISHES" TO PRIME MINISTER GANDHI.

3. MINISTER OF STATE FOR COMMUNICATIONS GHIMERE, WHO ADDRESSED OPENING ANNIVERSARY CEREMONY, COVERED MUCH OF THE SAME GROUND. HE WAS EQUALLY EFFUSIVE IN PRAISE OF INDIAN COOPERATION WHICH WAS OF "SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE" TO NEPAL. "NEPALESE PEOPLE," HE NOTED, "WERE DETERMINED TO MAINTAIN AT ALL TIMES A MATURE AND CORDIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH INDIA BASED ON EQUALITY." GHIMERE ASKED JOURNALISTS TO REALIZE DANGER OF THOSE WHO TRIED "KNOWINGLY OR UNKNOWINGLY" TO DISTORT NEWS FROM NEPAL.

4. EX-PRIME MINISTER BISTA AND INDIAN AMBASSADOR RASGOTRA ALSO TOOK OPPORTUNITY TO STRESS IMPORTANT STAKE BOTH NATIONS HAVE IN GOOD RELATIONS; RASGOTRA IS QUOTED AS SAYING THAT HE HAD "NOT SLIGHTEST DOUBT THAT AGE-OLD FRIENDLY RELATIONS WOULD BECOME STRONGER WITH PASSAGE OF TIME."

5. COMMENT: BOTH "GORKHAPATRA" AND "RISING NEPAL" (PRO-GOVERNMENT) GAVE EXTENSIVE COVERAGE TO CELEBRATION. "RISING NEPAL," FOR EXAMPLE, HEADLINED RIJAL INTERVIEW AS "NO SERIOUS PROBLEM EXISTS BETWEEN INDIA, NEPAL." THIS PUBLICITY IS LATEST EXAMPLE OF HMG EFFORTS TO IMPROVE TONE OF ITS BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH INDIA. GON HAS MADE MAJOR EFFORT TO CURB PRESS SNIPING AT INDIA IN RECENT MONTHS, MOST DRAMATIC EXAMPLE OF WHICH WAS VIRTUAL SILENCE OF OFFICIAL PRESS OVER ABSORPTION OF SIKKIM. NONETHELESS, NUMEROUS POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS REMAIN. WE NOTE, FOR

EXAMPLE, THAT SAME ISSUE OF "RISING NEPAL" CARRIES REPORT OF SPEECH OF NEPALESE AMBASSADOR TO NPT REVIEW CONFERENCE IN WHICH NEPAL REITERATES CALL FOR BAN ON ALL UNDERGROUND NUCLEAR TESTING AS WAY TO HALT NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION. NEPAL NOTED THAT NON-NUCLEAR STATES, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHICH ARE NON-ALIGNED, COULD NOT TAKE REFUGE IN NPT IN ABSENCE OF CREDIBLE GUARANTEES FROM NUCLEAR POWERS. SPEECHES OF THIS ILK PRESUMABLY ARE NOT WELCOME IN NEW DELHI.

6. ALTHOUGH PUBLIC DEBATE ON ECONOMIC DIFFERENCES HAS ABATED
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SOMEWHAT, MAIN OUTSTANDING ISSUES HAVE BEEN POSTPONED, NOT RESOLVED. FOR EXAMPLE, THERE CONTINUES TO BE APPREHENSION IN KATHMANDU OVER EFFECT NEW INDIAN PRICING SYSTEM WILL HAVE ON COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. IN ADDITION LOCAL PRESS HAS CARRIED NUMEROUS REPORTS OF CONTINUING PROBLEM OF CLEARING GOODS DESTINED FOR NEPAL THROUGH INDIAN BORDER CHECK POINTS. INDIANS HERE ARE ALSO MUCH CONCERNED BY RECENT GON DECISION TO RAISE BONUS ENTITLEMENT FOR EXPORT

WHICH THEY ASSERT WILL HAVE EFFECT OF ENCOURAGING DEFLECTION
OF INDIAN EXPORTS VIA NEPAL. THUS, ALTHOUGH RIJAL'S STATEMENT
IS A WELCOME INDICATION OF NEPALESE DESIRE TO SETTLE
DIFFERENCES IN A RATIONAL AND UNEMOTIONAL FASHION, NATURE
AND COMPLEXITY OF MANY ISSUES ARE SUCH THAT IT WILL REQUIRE
CONSIDERABLE FOREBEARANCE AND TACT ON BOTH SIDES TO RESOLVE
THEM WITHOUT RANCOR OR PUBLIC RECRIMINATION.

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